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AUTHOR	Addison, Linda
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ABSTRACT

In this digest identification and development of leadership skills in gifted and talented students are examined. Leadership is analyzed and its scope expanded from qualities of one who leads to a more complex view of how a person exerts influence. Conceptions of task-oriented versus relationship-oriented leaders are considered. Ways in which teachers can identify leadership among gifted and talented students are noted, including interviews, leadership styles instruments, and nomination and/or rating by peers, teachers, self, or community group members. Comprehensive leadership development programs are analyzed in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitude components. Administrative arrangements for leadership training may range from one-day colloquia to year-long leadership programs. A brief list of resources concludes the digest. (CL)

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1985
DIGEST

LEADERSHIP SKILLS AMONG THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

Interest in the identification and nurturance of leadership potential dates back to the time of Aristotle and Plato. Continuing interest in leadership has been evident in federal and state legislation for the gifted and talented. Leadership has been a designated talent area in the definition of gifted students who require a differentiated program. In addition, one aim of differentiated instruction for students gifted in areas other than leadership is to help these students assume leadership roles in their chosen fields. Thus, development of leadership abilities of gifted students can take a two-prong approach—nurturance of students identified as gifted leaders and the development of leadership abilities of students gifted in any of the other talent areas.

What is Meant By Leadership?

Leadership is the ability to influence the activities of an individual or group toward the achievement of a goal. The definition has evolved from the idea of a leader being a born leader or simply "one who leads" to a more complex view of how a person exerts influence. For example, leaders can be influential as task-oriented leaders or relationship-oriented leaders. The task-oriented leader excels at establishing well-defined patterns of organization, channels of communication, and ways of getting tasks accomplished. The relationship-oriented leader, on the other hand, leads by maintaining personal relationships between members of the group by opening up communication, providing emotional support and using facilitating behaviors. Both task-oriented and relationship-oriented leaders are necessary for effective group functioning, but the leadership abilities of either one of these leaders may go unnoticed if the definition of leadership used by the schools is too one-dimensional. Another helpful dichotomy for identifying and nurturing leadership abilities of gifted and talented students is that of the active versus the reflective leader. The active leader exerts influence over the group through the force of his or her personality. Political, community, or student council leaders are examples of active leaders. The reflective leader, on the other hand, is influential through the force of his or her ideas. Thus, while Einstein may never have campaigned for office, he is a leader because of the influence of his ideas. Students gifted in any of the talent areas have the potential to lead by contributing influential ideas to their chosen fields. While there may be no single best definition of leadership, teachers working with gifted and talented students may use these broadened notions of leadership to identify the strengths and weaknesses of students as the framework for an intervention program. As with creativity and thinking abilities, leadership skills can be developed and honed through training programs.

How Can Teachers Identify the Leadership Abilities of Gifted and Talented Students?

There is no standardized test of leadership which will identify the leadership potential of gifted and talented students. As with other areas of giftedness, a combination of methods will aid the teacher in identifying those who excel in this area and in determining individual strengths and weaknesses. Some of the methods found to be useful in this area include: nomination and/or rating by peers, teachers, self, or community group members (i.e., scout, church or 4-H group leaders); observation of simulation activities; biographical information on past leadership experiences; interviews; and personality tests (such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) or leadership styles instruments (such as the Leader Effectiveness and Adaptability Description) which may be interpreted to give leadership profiles. Many group dynamics and human relations textbooks contain checklists that further pinpoint leadership abilities. The information gathered in this process should give direction to the intervention program and should be collected on a continuous basis.

What Are the Components of a Leadership Development Program?

A comprehensive leadership development program can be developed around the following components:

- *Knowledge:* Historical study of leaders, qualities of leaders, theories of leadership, leadership styles.
- *Skills:* Organization and delegation, problem solving, shared leadership, communication, futuristic thinking, decision making, conflict resolution, goal setting, group dynamics, divergent thinking, time management.
- *Attitudes:* Self-confidence as a leader, flexibility, social and moral responsibility, sensitivity to others, enthusiasm, sense of commitment.

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Profiles of individual student strengths and weaknesses in these areas can assist the teacher in refining the focus of the intervention program. Leadership training typically occurs in a group context, but gifted and talented students benefit from setting and developing individual goals related to leadership knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

What Administrative Arrangements Facilitate Development of Leadership Abilities?

There are many possible administrative arrangements to deliver leadership training, ranging from one-day to year-long efforts. One day convocations or colloquia on leadership may involve one school district or may be a regional effort. These often offer the opportunity to involve community members who have leadership positions or are connected with leadership training programs in their own positions. Short-term offerings on leadership may be arranged for in-class time, or may occur before or after school or during summers. Options might include: learning centers designed to teach knowledge or skills; thematic units in social studies, language arts, or science; seminars or mini-courses, perhaps conducted by community resources; or elective courses specifically on leadership. Year-long leadership programs may involve integrating leadership skills training into subject area such as social studies or into co-curricular activities, or they may entail setting up mentorships or internships with persons in the community who are in leadership positions. A school district seeking to implement a leadership program should survey the needs of their students and the resources available in the area to facilitate the choice of alternative programs.

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Prepared by Linda Addison, Consultant, Gifted Education, Arlington, Virginia.

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